

# **Division of Public Health and Indian River School District Announce TB Response at Howard T. Ennis School**

**DOVER** – The Division of Public Health (DPH) and Indian River School District announced today that a small number of individuals may have been exposed to someone with active tuberculosis (TB) as part of being transported to and from the Howard T. Ennis School. DPH is making contact with those individuals to offer free screenings, as well as treatment if needed. To protect medical privacy, no additional information will be provided on the active TB case or the individuals who need testing.

While the risk of transmission is low, the medical guidance is that those who have been exposed and become infected with the TB bacteria should be treated so they do not develop TB disease. DPH began the outreach Monday afternoon via phone call and a letter to the small number of individuals who need testing. The outreach continues today.

“At the Division of Public Health, we understand that this news can be concerning to parents and the community. I am grateful to the Indian River School District and the team at Ennis who are working closely with us,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “We have reached out to the small number of individuals who need testing. If someone does not hear from us by letter or phone, they have no reason to get tested. This situation is a good reminder that TB is still active in our community and it’s important to test those who may be at risk for the disease.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the

following people get tested for TB:

- People who have may have been exposed to someone who has TB disease.
- People from a continent or country where TB disease is common, including but not limited to, Eastern Europe, Russia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa.
- People who live or work in high-risk settings (for example, correctional facilities, long-term care facilities or nursing homes, and homeless shelters).
- Health care workers who care for patients at increased risk for TB disease.
- Infants, children and adolescents exposed to adults who are at increased risk for latent tuberculosis infection or TB disease.

“In consulting with the Division of Public Health, we believe the risk of transmission in this case to be low,” Indian River School District Superintendent Mark Steele said. “However, as a precautionary measure, we join DPH in recommending that certain individuals be tested for the disease. We have facilitated testing for those individuals determined to be in need of screening. The Indian River School District is committed to taking every possible precaution to assure the health and safety of students, staff and parents.”

TB is generally on the decline throughout the country – with 9,557 cases nationwide in 2015 – but vigilance is important. Delaware had 22 cases of TB disease (also known as “active TB”) in 2015, 16 in 2016, and 10 to date in 2017. As opposed to the latent kind, TB disease cases are defined as having the symptoms of the illness and potentially being able to spread it to others.

TB is a bacteria that can be inhaled into the lungs of others when a nearby person with the active disease coughs, sneezes, sings or laughs. People with TB disease are most likely to spread the disease to people they spend time with every day,

such as family or other household members, close friends, and coworkers. Signs and symptoms of TB may include a progressively worsening cough that lasts more than two weeks, fatigue, weakness, weight loss, night sweats, fever, chills, and chest pain. TB can affect any bodily organ, but is infectious to others only when it occurs in the lungs or larynx (voice box).

Most people who are infected with the TB bacteria will have a positive TB test, but will never develop symptoms and cannot spread the disease to other individuals. Only people with TB symptoms can spread the disease. TB is not spread by shaking hands, touching, sharing food or drink, utensils, bed linens or toilet seats, sharing toothbrushes, or saliva from kissing.

TB disease is treatable and curable, usually by taking several medications for 6 to 9 months. About 5 percent to 10 percent of persons infected with TB bacteria will develop the disease at some time in their lives; most within the first two years after the infection occurs.

In most people who breathe in TB bacteria and become infected, the body is able to fight the bacteria to stop them from growing. The bacteria become inactive, but they remain alive in the body and can become active later. This is called latent TB infection. People with latent TB infection cannot spread TB bacteria to others. People who have latent TB infection can be treated to prevent TB disease from developing.

For additional information on tuberculosis, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at: <https://www.cdc.gov/tb/default.htm>.

*A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's*

*spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.*

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.